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ABSTRACT

Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed neuro-linguisitc programming (NLP) after observing "the magical skills of potent psychotherapists" Frederick Perls, Virginia Satir, and Milton Erikson. They compiled the most effective techniques for building rapport, gathering data, and influencing change in psychotherapy, offering them only as an explicit set of tools which will help one to become a more effective therapist. Bandler and Grinder claim they are not theoreticians, but examinination of NLP's relationship to traditional theories of psychotherapy reveals that it is based on a well-constructed eclectic theory. Neuro-Linguistic Programming resembles work done three decades earlier by Dr. Eric Berne, who also wrote about "map and territory." Although Bandler and Grinder do not cite them, developers of transactional analysis (TA) and behavior therapy clearly set precedent for the methods of study and subsequent technical development of NLP. Neuro-Linguistic Programming is based on a highly structured, eclectic theory which combines analytic, humanistic, behavioral, and cognitive theories. The techniques of NLP are the combination and refinement of the most effective therapeutic interventions. (ABL)

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Neuro-Linguistic Programming:

The New Eclectic Therapy

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Abstract

Richard Bandler and John Grinder, developers of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), claim they are not theoreticians, but examination of NLP's relationship to traditional theories of psychotherapy reveals that it is based on a well-constructed eclectic theory. Although Bandler and Grinder do not cite them, developers of transactional analysis (TA) and behavior therapy and clearly set precedent for the methods of study and subsequent technical development of NLP.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming: The New Eclectic Therapy

Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) after observing "the magical skills of potent psychotherapists" (Bandler & Grinder, 1976, p. 2) Frederick Perls, Virginia Satir, and Milton Erikson. They compiled the most effective techniques for building rapport, gathering data, and influencing change in psychotherapy, offering them only as "an explicit set of tools which will help you to become a more effective therapist" (Bandler & Grinder, 1975, p. 2). This casual regard for the position of NLP in the scheme of psychotherapeutic approaches seems to support their metaphoric observation that "the map is not the territory", (Bandler & Grinder, 1976, p. 4), inferring that experience only represents a portion of reality.

A review of the literature reveals: (a) NLP resembles work done three decades earlier by Dr. Eric Berne, who also wrote about "map and territory" (1972, p. 407); (b) technically, NLP relies heavily on the concepts of transactional analysis (TA) and the interventions of behavior therapy; and (c) NLP is based on a highly structured, eclectic theory which combines analytic, humanistic, behavioral and cognitive theories.

Prior Study of Intuition

Bandler and Grinder (1979) attempted "to figure out what it is that effective therapists do intuitively or unconsciously, and to make up some rules that can be taught to someone else" (p. 9). Berne (1957) states that "intuitions can be exercised only at such times and under such circumstances as the intuiter himself feels are correct....[He sought to] discover how to control intuition so that it can be brought into play at will" (p. 279).

In a study of intuition, Berne recognized that when many intuitive predictions were made by an individual "the grounds for making predictions could be put into words so that eventually, instead of using intuition to predict...[predictions could be made] by applying certain rules which could be written down" (p. 284). He found that "with each new rule that was written down, the accuracy of guessing by conscious observation went up, but was always less than the intuitive accuracy" (p. 285).

More specifically, when recognizing that the grounds for intuitive predictions were frequently associated to visual cues, Berne concluded that, "intuitions about Id tensions are mostly formed by watching the mouth of the

subject, while intuitions about Ego attitudes mainly come from observing the eyes" (p. 286).

While Berne's intentions and findings are similar to Bandler and Grinder's, he concluded that "intuitive accuracy was always greater than the accuracy obtained by applying consciously those rules which could be written down" (p. 285). This conclusion somewhat contraindicates the necessity of Bandler and Grinder's extensive writing of rules and suggests study of the conditions which enhance, rather than explain, intuition.

Uncited Precursors

Bandler and Grinder rarely make reference to Eric Berne, but many of their concepts clearly reflect TA. Many of the reframing techniques which they espouse incorporate the concept that "each part has a valid function and a valid way of accomplishing its function" (1982, p. 45) closely resembling Berne's ego state, "a system of feelings accompanied by a related set of behavior patterns" (1964, p. 23). Lankton (1980), when comparing the dissociation technique of NLP to the operations of TA, found that "at the level of process structure T.A. [sic] treatment or therapy displays the same formal patterns" (p. 197).

The psychotherapists chosen for observation by Bandler and Grinder undoubtedly contribute to the TA concepts which prevail in NLP. Satir (1972) bases numerous interventions on the communication patterns of "placating, blaming, computing, and distracting" (p.59). These clearly correspond to the behaviors in TA's adaptive child, critical parent, adult, and natural child.

Perls techniques are compatible with Berne's concepts, as demonstrated by James and Jongeward (1971) who studied with both, and who suggest that a loser "like the frog-prince in the fairy tale...who wants to become more like the winner he or she was born to be, can use gestalt-type experiments and transactional analysis [together] to make change happen" (p. 6).

The influence of Satir, Perls, and Erikson is most evident in the rapport building and information gathering stages of NLP, particularly with the techniques of pacing and predicate matching. Although these are important in the therapeutic process, most actual interventions are behavioral as evidenced by the similarity between anchoring and positive reinforcement; future pacing (anchoring a new response to an old stimulus) and operant conditioning; and collapsing anchors and reciprocal

inhibition. Cognitive restructuring is evident in the reframing technique. Despite the difference in style, reframing also resembles rational emotive therapy's disputing of irrational beliefs. Haley (1981), describing Erikson's use of metaphor, suggests a cognitive basis for its effectiveness. He states, "Erikson's use of stories in his conversations gave people of diverse views metaphors where they discovered their own ideas" (p. 152). In NLP's terms he assisted them in expanding their models of the world.

Bandler and Grinder (1979) allege that "the field of psychotherapy keeps developing the same things over and over again" (p.13). Perhaps a more accurate statement is that the field of psychotherapy, including NLP, combines a limited amount of knowledge in unlimited ways. A recent formalized combination has been presented by Lazarus (1981) who, like Bandler and Grinder, utilizes a variety of "therapeutic options" (p.160) which include behavioral, cognitive, and affective interventions. Unlike Bandler and Grinder, Lazarus, who describes multimodal therapy as "technically eclectic" (p.5), makes clear reference to the modes of therapy which are chosen for a client and the assessment factors leading to that choice.

Theoretical Eclecticism

Bandler and Grinder consistantly deny a theory of NLP. NLP functions, however, on a set of assumptions which meet the criteria for a theory of psychotherapy.

Bandler and Grinder concurrently assume as humanists, that man is good and makes the best possible choices; as behaviorists, that man is determined by what choices are available to him; and as analytic theorists, that man has unconscious processes.

In NLP, personality is a constellation of behavioral choices made by rules operative in the individual's representation of his environment. Anxiety is the result of a (cognitive) gap between reality and this representation, which limits behavioral choices. As in behavior therapy, the goal of therapy is solution of the presenting problem.

Discusion

NLP is, in fact, a well-constructed, highly structured, eclectic counseling theory. When it is considered as such in relationship to other counseling theories (see Appendix) its position evolves logically. Its techniques, therefore, are the combination and refinement of the most effective therapeutic interventions.

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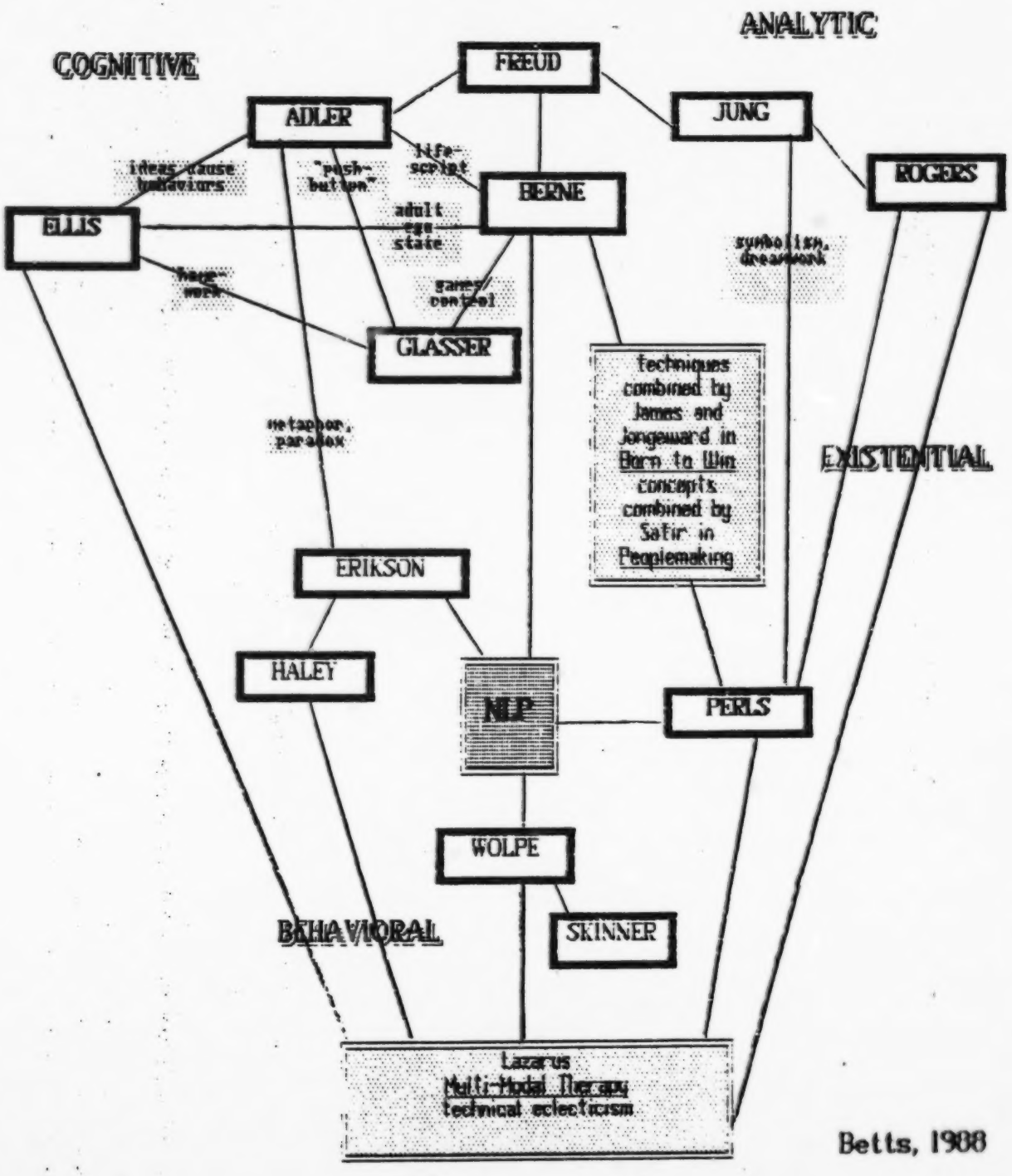
Appendix

INTER-RELATEDNESS OF THEORIES OF PSYCHOTHERAPY



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